United Nations A/S-19/PV.6

General Assembly
Nineteenth Special Session

Official Records

6th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 25 June 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Minoves-Triquell (Andorra), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 8 *(continued)*

Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21

The Acting President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Árpád Göncz, President of the Republic of Hungary.

Mr. Árpád Göncz, President of the Republic of Hungary, was escorted to the rostrum.

President Göncz: It is indeed an honour for me to address the Assembly at such a critically important juncture of the history of the United Nations on the highly topical issues of environment and development for the benefit of mankind. I am really happy to see so many familiar faces from five years ago in Rio, where the United Nations held its first major conference in a series that was bound to cover major global issues.

At the time of the Rio Conference, we were just escaping from the shackles of the cold war. Joyful and optimist, we tried to forge a new global partnership for a new era of human history. This partnership was not supposed to bear the imprints of strategic power struggles, but rather was envisaged as an avenue to realize what is achievable, based on the thorough evaluation of what is possible and desirable in order to preserve our planet for the generations to come. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was to provide us with the guidance of key principles for managing this most important heritage of ours, while stimulating environmentally sustainable economic growth for the benefit of all.

Five years after UNCED, we are not only somewhat older but a lot wiser as well. Times have dramatically changed during those five years. Therefore, for us to adapt to the new challenges requires a new vision beyond our shared commitments, perseverance and optimism. This should be based upon innovative thinking, which must be, however, firmly anchored in the sound cognizance of what is possible and achievable.

The series of global conferences held in the wake of the Rio Summit, such as those on population, human rights, human settlements, social development and women, charted fundamental courses of action to be followed. At the same time, they gave a significant boost to starting to rethink the whole mission of the United Nations for the twenty-first century. We view this special session as an important element of the thorough stock-taking efforts aimed at giving a new impetus to the implementation of Agenda 21, while striving to ensure that they are embedded into the overall reform process of the United Nations.

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The lessons and tasks emerging from global conferences and from other areas of United Nations activity have a twofold nature. On the one hand, each of them, having its undisputed merits, appears to lend itself to universal collective action. On the other hand, taken in their totality, they require not only that we set our priorities but also a thorough efficiency probe and maybe a fuller use of the principle of subsidiarity as well. United Nations global conferences such as UNCED cannot be successfully implemented outside the reform efforts, and, conversely, no reform effort can be successful that ignores the basic tenets of the courses of action charted at Rio, Vienna, Cairo, Istanbul, Copenhagen and Beijing. To bridge these gaps in institutional capacity and resources through our common political will is the real test of the partnership we demonstrated in Rio and what we seek to uphold at this special session.

Globalization, integration and interdependence can and should be important driving forces towards environmentally sound sustainable development. Regrettably, in our contemporary world we see only too often patterns of disintegration and the absence of the rule of law, accompanied by flagrant violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. These constitute not only an affront to human dignity, but they have the adverse effect of hindering sustainable human development and most often bring about a fatal degradation of the environment as well. Sound environmental management and sustainable growth are constant challenges. They necessitate the prevalence of the rule of law and the sustained commitment of Governments to work for the benefit of their own people in accordance with the principle of good governance.

In the spirit of the Rio Conference, we have achieved significant results in restructuring our economy and laying down the foundations of integrated environmental protection. Our new laws on environment and our new National Environment Protection Programme both duly reflect the recommendations of Agenda 21 and the principles of sustainable development.

The main objectives of Agenda 21 remain high on our own agenda. It is against this background that we are called upon today to realistically assess our own achievements and formulate concrete, action- and result-oriented plans for the implementation of its key areas, focusing primarily on those that are critical in their social, economic and environmental aspects. I wish to refer to sectoral issues dealing with energy, transport, land use and agriculture, water resources management, forestry, tourism and the safe disposal of toxic and radioactive waste.

We are aware that in the years to come we will have to focus on the implementation of the international programmes. Here the implementation of Agenda 21 requires a strong sense of partnership within individual societies as well. The Rio Conference marked the beginning of a new era, when concerned citizens, civic organizations and environmental groups are increasingly making their voices heard and are at the same time carrying out vital projects through their own activities, thus contributing to the objectives set out at Rio. The stimulus for social mobilization generated by this process can hardly be overestimated, and we all express our gratitude for their efforts, enthusiasm and devotion.

The Commission on Sustainable Development has proven to be an effective forum for dialogue and concerted international action in promoting Agenda 21 and in facilitating the interaction of different actors, such as United Nations agencies, Governments and non-governmental organizations. Hungary is proud to serve on the Commission, and we look forward to contributing to the partnership begun at Rio and to making it relevant for the challenges of the next millennium.

Five years ago in Rio, I committed myself to the promotion of the relevant principles, programmes and conventions that will contribute to the solution of global problems relating to the environment. Now I can already see that we still have a long way to go, and that much remains to be done before we achieve our final goals and realize our commitments.

The Acting President: I thank the President of the Republic of Hungary for his statement.

Mr. Árpád Göncz, President of the Republic of Hungary, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency The Right Honourable Justin Malewezi, Vice-President of the Republic of Malawi.

The Right Honourable Justin Malewezi, Vice-President of the Republic of Malawi, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Malewezi (Malawi): Let me begin by extending my sincere congratulations to Ambassador Razali on his election to the high office of President of this very important nineteenth special session of the General Assembly.

Five years ago, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, we all committed ourselves to the principles of sustainable development. The adoption of Agenda 21 as the blueprint for achieving sustained economic growth and social development while assuring the protection and preservation of the environment signified a bold global effort to work in partnership for the benefit of present and future generations. At the highest political level, we made a quantum leap towards sustainable development, and we have assembled here now to assess our achievements or failures and to chart the course of action for the future. This is definitely a time to renew our political commitment and to forge ahead with the full implementation of what was agreed at the Earth Summit.

For Malawi, the record of achievement and constraints in the implementation of Agenda 21 is clearly outlined in the Malawi country profile submitted earlier in the year. It is, however, worthwhile to note that the ushering in of our first democratically elected Government in 1994, after 30 years of dictatorship, provided a fresh impetus and helped in harnessing efforts aimed at addressing squarely the major environmental problems that we face. Indeed, we now have in place the policy and legal frameworks necessary to move forward; these include the formulation of a national environmental policy for guiding and coordinating all environmental issues.

We also have in place an environmental action plan which spells out ways and means of integrating economic development and sustainable environmental management. A central feature of these initiatives is the active involvement and participation of our communities themselves. All the other major stake-holders — Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, the University, parastatals, the business community and community-based organizations — were also involved in the process of formulating these vital policies and strategies for action. Major steps have also been taken to review and revise all pieces of sectoral legislation to ensure compatibility with Malawi's international obligations.

Malawi's commitment to the protection and preservation of the environment is enshrined in our Constitution, whose chapter on fundamental principles contains some important environmental principles, including that of sustainable development. In our overall vision of poverty alleviation and reduction, environmental concerns feature as the anchor of our social and economic development and of the future of our nation. We believe that our aspirations are in line with Agenda 21.

We do, however, realize that whatever we have done and intend to do, we can only achieve it as part of the international community. As a developing country and as one of the least-developed countries, our capacity to fulfil various aspects of Agenda 21 is severely constrained. Poverty in Malawi is one of the root causes of environmental degradation, particularly deforestation. Its eradication is therefore critical to natural-resource conservation, protection and sustainable utilization. Our resources are very limited and we are faced with very difficult choices. We therefore share the disappointment of many other countries that the current level of international cooperation in the implementation of Agenda 21 is a serious setback.

We note that there has been some progress generally in foreign capital flows, debt relief and domestic resource mobilization. We are, however, very concerned about the decline of official development assistance as a percentage of gross national product. It is therefore imperative that the long-standing resolve to commit 0.7 per cent of gross national product to official development assistance be honoured as a matter of urgency. We applaud those countries that have achieved this target and urge others to strive to reach it. We are very encouraged by the statements made by some countries during the past two days and welcome the positive attitude that seems to be emerging. Together, let us explore ways and means of resolving the remaining issues, especially those relating to debt, domestic resource mobilization policies and improved access to external finance. The need for new and additional resources demands that we urgently seek solutions that accentuate international cooperation.

We remain concerned about the inadequate progress in the areas of technology transfer, technical assistance and capacity building. The technological gap that currently exists between the developed countries and developing countries — particularly the least developed countries — is not conducive to the realization of the Rio commitments and our own national goals. We all need to nurture an enabling economic environment that allows developing countries access to international markets.

The successful realization of the Rio commitments also necessitates a higher degree of coordination of activities at national, regional and international levels. My delegation reaffirms the continued validity of all the agreements reached on the institutional arrangements to follow up the Rio Summit. In particular, we wish to highlight the central role of the Commission on Sustainable Development in this effort. We attach great

significance to the proposals made to reinvigorate the institutional frameworks responsible for coordinating environmental issues and look forward to a serious discussion of the proposals on the table.

Five years after Rio, the state of the global environment has continued to deteriorate. The consumption patterns that the Conference hoped to correct have not radically changed. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, a Declaration that sets forth the principles to guide the establishment of a new and equitable global partnership, continues to stand out as a reminder of how much remains to be accomplished. The global conferences that have taken place since Rio — from Vienna to Cairo, Copenhagen to Beijing, and Rome to Istanbul — continue to acknowledge, and rightly so, the interlinkages that exist between the human being, the environment and development, and the fact that social, economic and environmental objectives are mutually reinforcing.

Let us today harness the holistic approach of these conferences and reaffirm our common and differentiated responsibilities in the protection and preservation of the environment so as to achieve sustainable development. Let us affirm once again that we will make the major shift that is required to put our planet Earth on a more secure and sustainable basis for the future, for both present and future generations.

The Acting President: I thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Malawi for his statement.

The Right Honourable Justin Malewezi, Vice-President of the Republic of Malawi, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sidi Mohammed, Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sidi Mohammed, Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco, was escorted to the rostrum.

Crown Prince Sidi Mohammed (*interpretation from Arabic*): Five years ago, I had the honour to address, on behalf of my father, His Majesty King Hassan II, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio in June 1992. The Conference was indeed a decisive turning point in bringing about a keener awareness of the dangers threatening our planet Earth. Today I have that same honour: to address this Assembly on behalf of my father, who attaches the greatest interest to the topic of our proceedings.

The Rio Conference demonstrated the limitations of the model for economic growth based on unrestrained production and consumption that recklessly exhausts mankind's heritage of natural resources. In its conclusions, it also broadened the issue of human rights to include the equally crucial issue of man's obligations towards other species. The Conference also enshrined the principle of equality between all human beings in sharing and enjoying a quality environment and agreed to the concept of differentiated responsibility, taking into account, on the one hand, the role played by the industrialized countries in the deterioration of ecosystems and, on the other, the limited means available to the developing countries for the struggle against such deterioration.

Agenda 21, which was adopted in Rio by consensus in order to reconcile development and environment, constitutes a coherent programme of action, just as it stresses our political commitment to building active international solidarity. However, this solidarity will prove meaningless unless it meets the expectations of the countries of the South with regard to capital and technology transfer. Otherwise, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for them to take part in the world effort to safeguard the environment. In this respect, we think that it has become more urgent than ever to endow multilateral institutions and mechanisms with the financial means to ensure transfers of technology and substantial aid to the countries needing it.

Morocco became aware early on of the negative consequences that industrial production has on the environment. Soon after the Stockholm Conference, therefore, we introduced specific incentives into the laws promoting investments, so as to encourage non-polluting industries. We also elaborated action plans and took the institutional, financial, standardization and regulatory measures required to adequately respond to the new challenges and stakes involved in sustainable development.

Today, the environmental dimension is being considered at the governmental level, a ministry having been created for that purpose. The issue is also being dealt with through cooperation and coordination within a National Environmental Council, which has been regionalized and equipped with a National Commission for Sustainable Development.

Our national action plan for the preservation of the environment is founded on a medium and long-term strategy based on a participatory approach. Morocco is a party to all the relevant international conventions and has spared no effort to promote multilateral cooperation, as it remains convinced of the transnational nature of environmental concerns. Through its chairmanship of the executive bureau of the parties to the Barcelona Convention and of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, Morocco has contributed to all actions designed to make this region a model of partnership and solidarity among Mediterranean countries.

At a more general level, the role played by Morocco in the success of the Uruguay Round negotiations brought about the conclusion, upon its territory, of the agreement creating the World Trade Organization. Morocco's belief in the liberalization of trade stems from its desire to see globalization contribute to the establishment of sustainable development for the benefit of all peoples, while remaining mindful in particular of the legitimate needs of developing countries.

Environmental protection and the preservation of natural resources for the benefit of all constitute two conditions for the preservation of international peace and security. In this connection, it is unnecessary to stress the fact that the shortages already affecting a number of vital resources obviously fuel tensions and presage conflicts in various regions. That is why this special session should concern itself with these foreseeable dangers within a global and forward-looking vision of world security and lay down the appropriate foundations to prevent conflicts in the next century.

Having had the privilege of hosting the first world water forum last March, Morocco proposes that the international community give the highest priority to the issue of water. We should arrive at a global consensus aimed at devising concrete initiatives for the promotion of sound and comprehensive management of this vital resource. Considering the global impact of drought and desertification, we also hope to see the international Convention on combating this scourge endowed with the necessary financial, institutional and human resources for its implementation.

Morocco recommends to this special session of the Assembly that we give further thought to the proposals relating to the establishment of mechanisms for the observation, detection and tackling of international environmental problems, as well as the establishment of data-exchange systems through international cooperation. I would like to reiterate the recommendation of my father, His Majesty King Hassan II, regarding the establishment of an international green force empowered to take action in case of ecological crises.

The persistent degradation of the environment today calls for us to come up with emergency measures to save humankind from self-destruction. However, all the material means we devote to this effort and all the legal provisions we adopt will be unable to help us reach our goal without the support of wise, collective behaviour. Hence the decisive role to be played by education in helping raise consciousness and promote respect for our ecosystem's vital elements, without which mankind would perish.

Aside from the dissemination of knowledge and know-how, this education should assign a large role to the ethical and religious dimension, whose decisive impact can bring discipline to behaviour and sublimate the general will. In this respect, we Muslims know that the Lord created the universe in perfect balance and endowed it with all that man needs. Indeed, God said,

> "And the earth We have spread out; set thereon
> Mountains firm and immovable;
> And produced therein all kinds
> Of things in due balance.
>
> "And We have provided therein
> Means of subsistence, - for you
> And for those for whose sustenance
> Ye are not responsible.
>
> "And there is not a thing
> But its treasures are with Us;
> But We only send down
> Thereof in due and ascertainable measures."
>
> *(The Holy Koran, XV: 19-21)*

We also know that man, as God's curate on Earth, is responsible for the fate and prosperity of the world. He is entitled to enjoy its riches, but only within the bounds of divine instructions that forbid excess and squandering.

This spiritual and ethical dimension, which must prevail in man's relation to the universe, is also enshrined in other religions. Its absence today from our model of development does great harm. It is imperative that we reinstate it in order to give development every chance of becoming sustainable.

The Acting President: I thank His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco for his statement.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sidi Mohammed, Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Albert Shabangu, MP, Minister of Economic Planning and Development of Swaziland.

The Honourable Albert Shabangu, MP, Minister of Economic Planning and Development of Swaziland, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Shabangu (Swaziland): Allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to extend the warm greetings and good wishes of His Majesty King Mswati III, Her Majesty the Indlovukazi and Queen Mother, the Government and the whole Swazi nation, to our friends and fellow Members at the United Nations.

The Rio Summit in 1992 raised hope and great expectations among the world's citizens, who were assured by our leaders that the serious problems of development and environment would be tackled through an accelerated spirit of global partnership in order to save a world finding itself on the brink of crisis and catastrophe. This global partnership embodied commitments under the Rio Declaration, especially principles such as that of "common but differentiated responsibility".

Five years later, the results of the Rio Summit can be given but scant praise. Environment problems are worse than ever, as the overall spirit of Rio has been abandoned. The political will which galvanized the Summit has also evaporated. This has resulted in the non-fulfilment of agreed commitments regarding financial targets. Swaziland looks to this special session as an opportunity for all of us to rededicate ourselves to the commitments we made in Rio.

Swaziland, like other developing nations, has a rich national resource base, a favourable climate and a culture which has traditionally promoted living in harmony with the environment. However, rapid population growth, industrialization, urbanization, increasing agricultural demands and a declining economy have exerted tremendous pressure on the natural-resource base, to such a degree that the signs of environmental degradation are evident everywhere and pose a great threat to sustainable development.

Despite lowered spirits and growing environmental problems, the Kingdom of Swaziland has made some progress in terms of translating the concerns of Agenda 21 and the other Earth Summit agreements into action. The most outstanding achievement has been the setting up of the Swaziland Environment Authority. The formation of the Authority has afforded a forum for the establishment and coordination of environmental policies, standards and mechanisms to ensure effective enforcement of environmental legislation. Development projects and programmes are now subjected to an environmental audit to assess possible negative impacts. Regulatory measures to minimize water pollution, littering and land degradation are being formulated through the agency and are beginning to yield good dividends.

As part of the drive to map out the road to sustainable development, the country has just completed the Swaziland Environmental Action Plan, which was developed through a participatory process involving all levels of Swazi society. This consultative process was accompanied by an awareness campaign, which has sparked considerable interest in the affected communities and a desire to take immediate and concerted efforts to remedy the problems. This achievement is viewed as the first and crucial step towards the successful implementation of Agenda 21

The delegation of the Kingdom of Swaziland further wishes to reaffirm its commitment to implementing the conventions and other agreements born of the Rio conference which our country has already ratified — namely, the Conventions on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Progress has already been made in implementing these Conventions. The Convention to Combat Desertification in particular has afforded Swaziland a unique opportunity for developing immediate and practical action at the grass-roots level where communities in drought-affected and degradation-prone areas have participated in a process aimed at improving their standard of living.

The non-governmental-organization community has formed an integral part of the process, especially in conducting awareness campaigns at the grass-roots level. All the activities under the Conventions fall within the

overall framework of the National Environmental Action Plan.

Though the strategies and action plans outlined above can be viewed as a big achievement in their own right, they form only part of the job that needs to be done. Financial resources, manpower and technological tools still need to be mobilized to enable implementation of these actions. Developing such support is becoming a difficult dream in the light of a declining economy and growing poverty.

To meet these challenges, the Government of the Kingdom has embarked on a National Development Strategy which sets out a vision for long-term sustainable development for the next 25 to 30 years. In the short term, the Government has committed itself to the Economic and Social Reforms Agenda, which is a programme of measurable objectives aimed at kick-starting economic and social development. All these strategic actions are aimed at addressing the threatening level of poverty, which is one of the biggest challenges to the environment and to the dreams of Rio.

Despite national measures undertaken to meet the challenges of a declining economy, it is becoming imperative and urgent that global financial mechanisms which are aimed at securing adequate and predictable financial resources be strengthened using every means possible.

Lastly, the vicious cycle encompassing poverty and over-consumption of natural resources cannot be overemphasized. It can only be hoped that in the coming five years, after this review, we shall see a renewed commitment in meaningful terms to increased official development assistance and the transfer of environmentally sound technology from the North to the South to assist developing countries in tackling the issue of poverty and environmental degradation.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Economic Planning and Development of Swaziland for his statement.

The Honourable Albert Shabangu, MP, Minister of Economic Planning and Development of Swaziland, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable David Sitai, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Solomon Islands.

His Excellency The Honourable David Sitai, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Solomon Islands, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Sitai (Solomon Islands): I am most privileged to have been given the opportunity to address this body this afternoon. I convey greetings to the Assembly from the Government and the people of Solomon Islands.

Living on forest-covered mountain islands in the midst of delicate marine environments, we, like the peoples of all small island countries, provide early warning of global warming. The economy of Solomon Islanders rests largely on agriculture, fishing and tropical forest products, so climate change, ocean pollution and the loss of biodiversity are serious threats. For us, Agenda 21 is a life-and-death matter. We welcome this special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise its implementation. The commitments and assurances made by the leaders of major industrial countries who have addressed us in these plenary meetings are appreciated, but action must follow soon. We of the small island developing States have limited resources. Solomon Islands is determined to do everything it can to fulfil the commitments it made five years ago at the Earth Summit, but the industrial countries have obligations too.

On the cover of my printed text, the Assembly can see a photograph of a house with a solar panel atop a pole at the right of the picture. The house is in the village of Sukiki on Guadalcanal, one of the six principal islands of my country. What makes Sukiki special is that it is the first village in Solomon Islands to be lighted by a solar-energy system. Each house now has electric lighting. The project was supported by the Solar Electric Light Fund, a non-governmental organization, and Guadalcanal Province. A similar project is under way nearby in the village of Makaruka, supported by the United Nations Trust Fund for New and Renewable Sources of Energy and financed by the Government of Italy. Solar energy, which radiates down on the Solomon Islands in abundance, will change the lives of the villagers. Night hours well illuminated by electricity mean more time for family life and work, study and play. We are a village-dwelling people. With electricity, the idea of designing and building model, economically viable villages becomes realizable. My Government views rural electrification, using renewable sources of energy wherever feasible, as indispensable for our programmes in public health, education, the advancement of women, communications, habitat improvement, environmental protection and sustainable economic and social development. If we do

not help our people solve the problems of village life, they or their children may someday crowd into the towns in the often fruitless search for work and better living conditions. The photograph of the house and its solar-energy installation symbolizes the possibilities of sustainable development in meeting the needs of rural people. At the same time, the people in our growing urban sector also have needs. My Government, in cooperation with the private sector, is addressing them.

The commitment of Solomon Islands to the principles of the Rio Declaration and the objectives of Agenda 21 is manifested in my Government's signing and ratification of the relevant international conventions and agreements, which include the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change in whose Conference of Parties we will actively participate next December. Solomon Islands supports the Alliance of Small Island States Protocol to the Framework Convention, as well as the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. We have signed the Waigani Convention on the importation and transport of hazardous and radioactive wastes into our region. Moreover, we are working to implement the action programmes adopted at recent United Nations world conferences, which are critical for achieving and maintaining sustainable development.

Solomon Islands continues to implement its National Environmental Management Strategy and participates in the current five-year South Pacific Regional Environment Programme. We now have under review our wetlands protection policy.

A sustainable forestry industry is crucial for the Solomon Islands economy. Legislation to ensure sustainable timber harvesting and forest utilization has been redrafted and a national code of logging practice adopted. Models for restoring logged timberland are being designed by the Solomon Islands Customary Land Reforestation Programme.

With the help of the South Pacific biodiversity conservation programme, we are creating community-based conservation areas. Research and surveys to document our rich biological resources, so that they may be protected, continue.

Fisheries legislation has been strengthened to help achieve sustainability and effective management. Bills dealing with the environment and the protection and management of wildlife were recently completed.

The Pacific Islands climate-change assistance programme will enable Solomon Islands to carry out a greenhouse gas inventory and to consider ways for dealing with climate change and sea-level rise. We are also participating in the South Pacific sea-level rise and climate-change monitoring programme. The International Coral Reefs Initiative and our region's 1997 Year of the Coral Reef, as well as a programme for the conservation of sea turtles, involve Solomon Islands.

In the work now at hand, Solomon Islands supports the submissions of the Group of 77 and China and those of the Alliance of Small Island States to the proposed outcome of the special session. We embrace the draft decision for the review in 1999 of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and call for clear financing mechanisms to implement it.

The immediate need for Solomon Islands is increased financial resources and assistance in education, coordinated capacity building and the transfer of appropriate technology. Global Environment Facility funding, including small grants, must be made accessible. Without additional financial resources, the coordination and implementation of Agenda 21 and other global initiatives at the national and local levels present a formidable task. International assistance and dialogue remain indispensable. Falling donor support and economic difficulties undermine our environmental efforts.

In concluding, may I say that, well before this special session opened, sceptics were saying that our efforts here would be an expensive exercise in futility. They will be proven right if the industrial countries do not meet the commitments they made five years ago at the Earth Summit. Now we need realistic targets and time-frames. Unfulfilled promises and failed initiatives provide rich soil for frustration and cynicism.

Solomon Islands, in cooperation with others, is working towards sustainable development. To do otherwise would threaten the viability of our island society. We advocate an environmental ethic based on answers to the question: What do the generations of today owe to those of tomorrow? With your indulgence, Sir, may I repeat the question? What do the generations of today owe to those of tomorrow? Everything, we believe.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Solomon Islands for his statement.

The Honourable David Sitai, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Solomon Islands, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pham Gia Khiem, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of Viet Nam.

Mr. Pham Gia Khiem, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of Viet Nam, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Pham Gia Khiem (Viet Nam): It is a great pleasure for me to attend the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly on environment and development and, on behalf of the Government delegation of Viet Nam, I would like to extend our thanks to Mr. Razali, President of the General Assembly, and to the Commission on Sustainable Development for their excellent organization of this important event, which I hope will give a new impetus to the implementation of Agenda 21.

In the wake of the 1992 Earth Summit, the Rio Spirit has been constantly kept alive by nations, regions, international organizations and people all over the planet. Viet Nam has considered the Rio documents as the starting point for every national endeavour in environmental programming and planning.

Following Rio '92, more comprehensive attention has been paid by the Government to environmental protection in terms of management, legislation and technological solutions. In September 1992, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment was founded, and in the following year the Law on Environmental Protection was promulgated. Viet Nam has ratified and undertaken to implement all environment-related international conventions, agreements and protocols before and after the Earth Summit.

Since 1992, many programmes and projects on environmental protection have been approved by the Government and given investment priority, such as the Poverty Eradication Programme, the Country Programme for Clean Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation, the Country Programme for Biodiversity Conservation and the newly launched Programme for Closing Natural Forests. A national environmental monitoring system is being put into operation, covering the country's land area, coastal zones and islands. Environmental impact assessments have been made compulsory for every new investment project.

Thanks to the open-door and renovation policy, over the past 10 years Viet Nam has emerged from a state of economic crisis and is now embarking upon the stage of industrialization and modernization. Economic development has been maintained at a rather high tempo, with a gross domestic product growth rate of 8-9 per cent per annum.

In the framework of the national socio-economic development strategy to the year 2020, efforts will be focused on the country's industrialization and modernization. This, no doubt, will bring greater pressure to bear on the environment. To ensure sustainable development, the Government has reconfirmed its concern for environmental protection and its commitment to larger investment in this domain.

In the spirit of Agenda 21, the Government of Viet Nam will continue giving high priority to the following programmes in the framework of the national socio-economic development plan: poverty eradication; population and sustainability; changing consumption patterns; community health protection and improvement; barren land and denuded hills greening; closing natural forest; and technology transfer.

This special session, in my opinion, along with the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, should come up with effective measures to bring the Rio ideals closer to reality. In this connection, we share the view that the United Nations bodies responsible for the environment and sustainable development should be strengthened in order to better discharge their respective mandates and functions.

The environment is a common concern of global dimensions. The Government of Viet Nam looks forward to concerted effective efforts in managing and protecting the global environment and in materializing the commitments to sustainable development that nations the world over made at Rio in 1992 and for which the United Nations is the coordinating body.

We also wish that the United Nations would provide Member States with regular information and warnings about the status of the environment at the national, regional and global levels in order to enable them to come up with timely action plans for the prevention and control of environmental catastrophes, which, it seems, have been occurring with greater frequency and intensity over the last few years.

On behalf of the Government of Viet Nam, I should like to extend our thanks to the other Member States and to the international organizations for their assistance to the cause of development and environmental protection in Viet Nam.

On the threshold of the twenty-first century — a century of human civilization and sustainable development — let us join hands in the struggle to sustain today's development while preparing a safer and better life for the people of tomorrow.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I thank the Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of Viet Nam.

Mr. Pham Gia Khiem, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of Viet Nam, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Nandimitra Ekanayake, Minister of Forestry and the Environment of Sri Lanka.

The Honourable Nandimitra Ekanayake, Minister of Forestry and the Environment of Sri Lanka, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Ekanayake (Sri Lanka): It gives me great pleasure to address this special session of the General Assembly on the review of the implementation of Agenda 21. We are pleased, Sir, to see you preside over this important session, and we are confident that with your extensive experience and knowledge you will be able to guide our deliberations to a successful conclusion.

The nineteenth special session of the General Assembly is an important milestone in the international effort to achieve sustainable development. Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration established a new approach to development which takes into account the sustainable use of natural resources. We agreed to adopt this approach and review the progress achieved after five years. Therefore, let us be objective and do some soul-searching in carrying out this review. Only then can we chart a course that will lead us expeditiously to sustainable development.

In Sri Lanka we have made some progress in implementing Agenda 21 and the environmental Conventions in the midst of difficulties arising from a continued war with a terrorist group and pressure to address the twin problems of poverty and unemployment. Her Excellency the President, in her policy statement presented to Parliament, stated that

> "to ensure that rapid economic growth does not jeopardize the quality of the environment, the Government will adopt a balanced strategy towards environmental protection and economic development".

Sri Lanka has inherited a culture which emphasizes harmony with the environment. Our National Environmental Act dates back to 1982. The institutional mechanisms and the legislative framework for environmental protection were in place, but the efforts to conserve the environment were ad hoc. Since 1992, the Ministry of Environment has taken a deliberate, integrated approach to the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. These measures include the preparation of a national environmental action plan, the drafting of a new environmental law, the gazetting of environmental regulations and standards to control pollution, the building of capacity for environmental impact assessment and law enforcement, environmental education and the mainstreaming of environmental concerns into development planning. We have also started implementing programmes of action to meet our commitments under the environmental Conventions.

To ensure effective policy responses and to mobilize the potential roles of partners — including the private sector, the scientific community and the non-governmental organizations — in decision-making, the Ministry of Environment has established inter-agency coordinating committees to implement the Conventions and to provide sector-specific environmental advocacy.

The Government has focused on the creation of environmental awareness and on improving the capacity of non-governmental organizations and the private sector to shoulder the responsibility of managing the environment. The importance of educating the youth on environmental conservation is also recognized. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Ministers of the Environment have approved a regional educational exchange programme for youth on a proposal made by Sri Lanka.

The Government of Sri Lanka has tried to address the social and economic aspects of sustainable development, such as poverty eradication, education, health, and human settlements, through pragmatic and market-oriented development strategies. Policy reforms,

institutional building, the active participation of the private sector and community groups, and infrastructure development were given a high priority. In response to these measures, Sri Lanka's economy grew at the rate of 5.4 per cent during the five-year period ending in 1995. This had the effect of raising the per capita gross national product, at current prices, to $637. However, this growth was insufficient to have the desired impact on the twin problems of poverty and unemployment. Unemployment remains at around 12.4 per cent, and a significant percentage of the population lives in poverty.

Persistent pockets of poverty in urban and rural areas have caused continued resource degradation. Slash-and-burn cultivation and cultivation on slopes by the rural poor have caused land degradation and the loss of habitats and biological diversity. Sri Lanka's forest cover has declined from 80 per cent to 20 per cent of the land area during the last 50 years, with implications for water management, the conservation of biological diversity and soil erosion.

Poverty has been a major cause of deforestation. To combat the resulting adverse impact, a Forestry Master Plan and a land use plan have been prepared. The over-exploitation of marine resources, sand mining and the over-extraction of lime by the poor in coastal areas have caused the depletion of these resources and exerted undue stress on these ecosystems. It is necessary to provide alternative sources of income to the poor to wean them away from the over-exploitation of these resources.

The Samurdhi Programme was launched in 1995 as a State intervention to assist the poor to embark on income-generating activities. Due to resource limitations, this programme covers only 1.2 million families. A higher level of economic growth is essential to address these problems.

With regard to human settlements, the spread of shanties and unauthorized urban constructions, particularly by the urban poor, has caused severe problems of drainage, flooding, and sewage and waste disposal, resulting in increased health problems. These problems are compounded by the urban migration of people in search of employment, particularly to the coastal cities, and by the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Overcoming the problems associated with poverty and unemployment is one of the serious challenges we face in the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

Although consumption patterns are not a major cause of environmental pollution so far, recent trends in trade show the introduction of products harmful to the environment and human health. There seems to be no complementarity between the globalization promoted by trade liberalization and the environmental and sustainable development goals of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). There is a tendency for developing countries to become dumping grounds for products not permitted in the markets of developed countries. Export growth is fundamental for economic growth in countries like Sri Lanka, and eco-labelling and other environmental measures should not be used to restrict market access to developing countries. There is a continued need to promote an open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system to remove barriers to sustainable growth.

Although a number of plans and programmes have been prepared for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in Sri Lanka, these efforts have been hampered by a lack of resources and of access to affordable technology and export markets. It is clear that the Rio principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and greater international cooperation for sustainable development have not been adequately translated into action as promised in Rio de Janeiro. Therefore, a renewed commitment is required, particularly from the developed countries, to share resources and technology to attain sustainable development.

Absolute poverty and environmental conservation cannot coexist. Our future course of action must necessarily emphasize economic growth in developing countries to stop environmental degradation due to poverty.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Forestry and the Environment of Sri Lanka for his statement.

The Honourable Nandimitra Ekanayake, Minister of Forestry and the Environment of Sri Lanka, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Juan Villarzu, Minister Secretary-General of the Presidency of Chile.

Mr. Juan Villarzu, Minister Secretary-General of the Presidency of Chile, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Villarzu (Chile) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I begin my remarks before this important Assembly by reaffirming my Government's commitment to the

principles and objectives agreed upon in Rio. Our development strategy incorporates the spirit of Agenda 21 in every sector. It seeks to combine economic growth with social justice and equity and with the preservation of the environment and improvement of the quality of life of all Chileans.

Since our return to democracy only seven years ago, we have shown that meeting this challenge is possible: we have been able simultaneously to achieve high rates of economic growth, a marked decrease in poverty and extreme poverty and substantial advances towards the protection of the environment. The recent Human Development Index published by the United Nations Development Programme, which puts Chile at the head of Latin America in terms of human development, fills us with pride and also inspires us to persevere on this path.

Since the Rio summit, Chile has enacted modern laws and has established new institutions for the protection of the environment and for the integration and protection of highly vulnerable groups such as indigenous populations and women. Our general environmental law, the first comprehensive body of law on that topic, was adopted in 1994. It established a coherent and stable legal framework and enshrined the principles of responsibility for environmental damage, prevention, gradualism, transparency and citizen participation. Chile is implementing a plan of action designed to repair environmental damage following decades of neglect, to establish unified standards for environmental quality and emissions, and to prevent or minimize environmental damage from the dynamic process of investment in our economy. We have done this by evaluating the environmental impact of all significant investment.

Our commitment to sustainable development not only derives from an ethical commitment, but also relates to the fact that our development is based, *inter alia*, on the use of our abundant natural resources, which is one of the principal foundations of the high rate of economic growth we have achieved in recent years. To continue on this path, which is essential if we are to put an end to poverty and open up genuine opportunities for the entire country, we have to ensure the sustainability of our renewable resources and the transformation of our non-renewable resources into capital, which should preferably be accessible to the poorest of our people. Our Government has therefore made quality and equality of education its main priority.

We have also been active in complying with our commitments under the conventions adopted at the Rio Conference. We have ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and we are in the final stages of ratifying the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. We are designing a national plan to combat desertification. We have developed an action plan for the preservation of biological diversity; in the context of this effort, 10 new protected areas have been created in the past three years, which means that 18 per cent of our territory is now under some kind of protection. We are also implementing innovative demonstration projects in the framework of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and the climate change Convention.

On the subject of forests, which are also at the heart of our concerns, we have been active participants in the Montreal Group. We are reviewing our forestry legislation and are preparing a complete survey of our native forests.

On the use, access to and preservation of water resources, we are a country with great social achievements and great environmental debt. Nearly 100 per cent of our urban population and more than 80 per cent of the concentrated rural population has access to drinking-water systems; but less than 12 per cent of our liquid wastes are treated before returning to natural basins, with the resulting high pollution costs. Yet we are making strides in water clean-up through the formulation of appropriate regulations and through an investment plan for household and industrial waste-water treatment throughout the country.

Another major challenge facing us is air quality in our cities and work-places. Here we are implementing a clean-up programme, *inter alia* in Santiago and various mining areas, at a cost of some $2.5 billion.

We are aware that we are facing a great challenge, which we share with all developing countries. We believe that we are on the right path. We do not want to be caught in the false dilemma of growth versus environment; nor will we accept pressure from interest groups or countries that would impose excessive demands upon us.

In this context Chile reaffirms its continued adherence to the principle of sovereign access by peoples to their natural resources, as set out in General Assembly

resolution 1803 (XVII), which is irrevocable and categorical.

For many developing countries, particularly the poorest, reconciling growth and the fight against poverty on the one hand and environmental protection on the other requires efforts that go beyond their means. The Government of Chile believes that the commitments assumed at Rio by the developed countries regarding technological and financial cooperation should be respected and stressed. We attach high value to the offers made here by some developed countries, which have reaffirmed those commitments, and we support the continuity and consolidation of the Global Environment Facility. As a country at a medium level of development, Chile is ready to join these efforts in this great endeavour. We can offer to share with the international community the experience we have gained in recent years.

I sincerely hope that in the next five years, we will be able to accelerate and deepen the process of the implementation of the Rio commitments at the national and world levels for the welfare of our countries and of the heirs of this planet.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Minister Secretary-General of the Presidency of Chile for his statement.

Mr. Juan Villarzu, Minister Secretary-General of the Presidency of Chile, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Sheikh Amer bin Shuwain Al-Hosni, Minister of Regional Municipalities and Environment of Oman.

Sheikh Amer bin Shuwain Al-Hosni, Minister of Regional Municipalities and Environment of Oman, was escorted to the rostrum.

Sheikh Amer bin Shuwain Al-Hosni (Oman) (*interpretation from Arabic*): My delegation is pleased to participate in the work of this session. On this occasion, I have the honour of conveying the best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said for the success of this session, aimed at strengthening the commitment of the international community to the conservation of the world environment and the protection of its resources and ecosystems for the benefit of humankind.

I should also like to take this opportunity to assure the Assembly of my country's commitment to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the principles declared at the Earth Summit. Such guidelines and principles form the basis on which the global partnership and collective responsibility to halt poverty, hunger, deterioration in health and the degradation of ecosystems will be built. The achievement of sustainable development is the only option available for humankind to secure the future for coming generations, as well as the welfare and prosperity of present generations.

As we review Agenda 21 and the 27 Rio principles, I believe that my country has already achieved tangible progress in this respect. This includes Oman's Arabian oryx sanctuary, which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has placed on the World Heritage List. We now have an integrated system of protected areas, which includes six sites, and constitutes an example of the early implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and chapter 15 of Agenda 21.

One of the many initiatives taken by my country on the basis on the royal directives of His Majesty the Sultan is the formulation of a national environment conservation strategy, which has been endorsed and approved by the Government and is designed to keep us up to date with development plans and to incorporate environmental considerations at all planning stages. Accounts for natural resources and environmental costs have also been incorporated into national accounts, and feasibility studies are being made for the various development projects and programmes. The strategy aims at attaining balanced and sustainable development in which the three elements of development — economic, social and environmental — are in harmony. This forms the basis of chapter 8 of Agenda 21 and reflects the spirit of the 27 Rio principles.

In the context of providing the best means and guarantees for protecting the marine environment of the region from the risk of oil pollution - particularly given the fact that most oil tankers to and from the Gulf pass the coast of Oman - the relevant authorities in the Sultanate are seeking to adopt the recommendations of the conference on tanker discharge and the prevention of marine pollution, which was hosted by the Sultanate in Muscat in 1995. The Sultanate declared its intention of establishing a facility for the reception of tanker discharge. It is encouraging other countries of the region to follow suit and is urging the Regional Organization for

the Protection of the Marine Environment to support this facility to ensure its success.

Given the increasing global concerns about the risks of chemicals and hazardous waste, Agenda 21 contained several chapters dealing with such risks. My Government has passed legislation dealing with the import, export, transport and handling of hazardous substances. A permanent committee was set up for this purpose, and its secretariat is in contact with the competent international organizations relating to the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals, the International Programme on Chemical Safety, and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Sultanate of Oman is part of the Arabian Peninsula, which suffers from desertification, according to the World Atlas of Desertification issued by the United Nations Environment Programme in 1992. My Government has therefore given special attention to combating desertification and has laid down specific plans to do so. The Sultanate was among the first States to sign the Convention to Combat Desertification.

Before concluding my statement, and having provided illustrations of the steps that we have taken to implement our commitments under Agenda 21, I urge other parties committed to the Rio Declaration, especially the financing agencies, organizations and States with scientific and technological capabilities, to assist developing countries to attain their goals, particularly with regard to technical assistance for formulating plans, projects and legislation, for monitoring, for providing data on hazardous substances and ecological degradation, and for training and scientific research.

In conclusion, I hope that this session will succeed in reaching conclusions that will benefit mankind, conserve the environment and achieve the optimal use of natural resources for sustainable development.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Regional Municipalities and Environment of Oman for his statement.

Sheikh Amer bin Shuwain Al-Hosni, Minister of Regional Municipalities and Environment of Oman, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fritz Longchamp, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Haiti.

Mr. Fritz Longchamp, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Haiti, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Longchamp (Haiti) (*interpretation from French*): An awareness of the dangers that humankind has brought up itself through the degradation of the environment took us to Rio five years ago. This collective concern led to the adoption of a programme of action for the twenty-first century, and we finally admitted that the process by which we satisfy our needs and improve the quality of our lives in the present should not compromise the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own requirements for an improved standard of living.

We must strive for a better quality of life and the achievement of sustainable development. This will require a certain balance between economic, ecological and social objectives. Our development must be centred on the human dimension, while at the same time we minimize the environmental impact - an impact that will constantly increase as more people aspire to a better standard of living. The high population growth rate as compared with the availability of resources, as well as consumption patterns, are potentially damaging to the environment. Present and future consumers must become aware of the consequences of their actions so that they can do something about them.

The management of the environment in our country is a major challenge. The degradation of our ecosystem has reached such a dimension that there are well-founded fears of ecological catastrophe. Accelerated deforestation and soil erosion have reduced the forest cover to less than 4 per cent of the territory. Twenty-five of the 30 river basins in the country have been deforested, thereby complicating the problem of the availability and management of freshwater resources and reducing the productivity of agricultural land.

The vulnerability of the country to natural disasters — cyclones, floods and earthquakes — is a further challenge. Our capacity to respond to these various problems has proved unequal to the task.

When the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, the Haitian people were living under a de facto military dictatorship. Nevertheless, its legitimate

representatives, who were living exile, were present at that forum as a result of the decision taken by the international community not to recognize the regime set up by the *coup d'état* of 30 September 1991.

Today the country is making the difficult transition to democracy and participation. Society and its institutions have been profoundly disrupted by our dictatorial past, by the political instability of the last 10 years and by inadequate attendance and instruction in our schools. This has also been due to grinding poverty and the high rate of population growth, which has made it necessary for our leaders to respond to emergencies while at the same time trying to direct the process of development for both the medium and the long terms.

The main constraints that have slowed down the process of implementing Agenda 21 internationally can be classified under two major headings. The first is that of the major political and economic obstacles that most of the country faces, including the growing gap between the standards of living of various social strata and the lack of progress in setting up a participatory system of State administration. The second is the existence of conflicting interests in connection with the proposed solutions to the problems of the Earth's environment, as seen in, for example, the lack of respect for the commitments and guidelines laid down in Rio.

The will of Haitian leaders, in the midst of this extremely difficult situation, to undertake the expected actions in the context of the Rio commitments resulted, in 1994, in the creation of the Ministry of the Environment, while Parliament ratified the Conventions on biodiversity, climate change and desertification and focal points encompassing various institutions, both in the public and private sectors, were set up in the framework of the Plan of Action for the Environment, particularly in the areas of establishing and managing a national system of protected areas, promoting alternatives to excessive consumption of charcoal and firewood and, recently, the management of freshwater resources and environmental education.

A project dealing with the management of the remaining forests in Haiti, which involves various institutions of central and local Government, as well as of the private sector, has also been set up. A credit of $21.5 million was negotiated with the World Bank for this purpose.

Tribute should be paid to the groups of artists and the non-governmental organizations and associations that have taken initiatives for environmental education in Haiti.

Despite the efforts that have been made by the Government, results on the macroeconomic level have not always been positive. Although the budgetary deficit is now under control, the same is not true of inflation, the rate of which for the current fiscal year will be approximately 12.3 per cent. The incentives offered to the private sector nationally and internationally have not been enough to attract the volume of investment needed for economic recovery.

As we pointed out earlier, if economic growth is to be viable it must be focused on the human being. In this connection, various programmes have been drawn up by our Government to combat poverty, the bane of relations between man and his environment. We stress the improvement of living conditions for the most disadvantaged strata of the population, particularly women, the unemployed and young people.

The question of education, which is essential for viable and sustainable human development, has priority in our governmental programme. Education officials met in January 1996 and drew up a national education and training plan. A frank and serious dialogue is under way among the various actors involved in the implementation of that plan. Education currently occupies an important place in our operating budget following lengthy negotiations between the Government and the teachers' association that resulted in commitments being made by the Government.

Representatives of the central Government and of communities meet regularly to exchange information and to discuss priorities and the implementation of these various activities.

We must use all the resources of our intelligence in order to continue to devise and implement a way to bridge the gulf that separates the political and economic interests of various groups. By solidly building such bridges wherever they are needed, economic boundaries will finally disappear. This is one way to make the globalization of the world economy a lasting reality.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Haiti for his statement.

Mr. Fritz Longchamp, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Haiti, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Adyasuren Tsohio, Minister of the Environment of Mongolia.

Mr. Adyasuren Tsohio, Minister of the Environment of Mongolia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Tsohio (Mongolia): This special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations is being held at a time when mankind is preparing to enter the twenty-first century. The Rio Conference has amply demonstrated that economic development and the quality of life of peoples can be assured only if development is pursued in tandem with social well-being and environmental protection.

Mongolia's economic reform and renewal coincide with the implementation of the decisions taken at the Rio Conference. My Government is taking decisive measures to implement them. It will further accelerate economic reform while bearing in mind the environment's sustaining capacity.

The impact of global climate change on Mongolia, a country with a dry, continental climate, situated far from the seas and oceans, is quite evident. Studies carried out over the last 50 years have shown that the overall temperature of Mongolia has increased by 0.7 degrees. Droughts occur every 2 to 3 years. The water levels of large rivers have dropped by 20 to 30 per cent. One third of our pastures and more than half of our cultivated lands have deteriorated. The productivity of the soil has decreased by 20 to 30 per cent. It is apparent that biodiversity is also being reduced at that pace.

However, we Mongolians have not been, nor will we be, sitting idly by. We have been and will be doing our best to cope with environmental, social and economic problems. We are all committed to implementing Agenda 21. Despite our problems and resource shortages, we are making strenuous efforts in this direction. We have also begun to draw up the Mongolian National Action Programme for the twenty-first century. It is my pleasure to announce that Mongolia is planning to expand its protected areas from 10 per cent to 15 per cent of its territory. In the long run, 30 per cent of its territory will be turned into protected areas.

The adoption of a package of environmental laws has marked an important step towards the creation of a sound legal basis for environmental protection in Mongolia.

A solid foundation has been laid for the further development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the field of environmental protection. However, there is a great need for technical and financial resources in order to halt environmental degradation, to rehabilitate nature and to create an ecological base for sustainable development. Time is also needed. There are many obstacles to resolving the acute problems and to raising public awareness of the need to protect the environment during the current period of financial difficulties and economic instability coupled with poverty and weak discipline.

Mongolia believes that the entry into force of the Conventions on climate change, biological diversity and desertification is a remarkable achievement that should be followed up by their full-scale implementation.

It should be noted that though many agreements and conventions have been concluded, no tangible results have been registered so far in their implementation. The main reasons for this are the lack of political will and the financial constraints we face. Most of the developed countries have not met the United Nations target of devoting 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to official development assistance.

It is regrettable that the commitments undertaken in Rio to ensure an adequate flow of financial resources have not been fulfilled. The financing of the Global Environment Facility, which is expected to be the principal mechanism for the implementation of Agenda 21 has fallen far short of expectations.

Like others, we appeal to the donor community to fulfil its commitments to replenish the Global Environment Facility. Due to a lack of financial resources, many poor developing countries are compelled either to reallocate budgets that are already stretched thin in order to implement recommendations that came out of the Earth Summit or to defer their implementation. While the former offers short-term solutions, these solutions cannot be maintained over a longer period. Therefore, official development assistance needs to be reaffirmed as an essential source for attaining sustainable development.

Access to the latest environmentally sound technologies is a prerequisite for overcoming the technological gap and harmonizing the relationship between production and the environment. In these circumstances, it is necessary to create a favourable environment of economic and legislative measures to

streamline the process of the transfer of technology. Consumption patterns should be further changed.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to express its hope that this special session succeeds in revitalizing the Rio process and giving new impetus to securing a common sustainable future. This is a unique opportunity that we cannot afford to miss.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of the Environment of Mongolia for his statement.

Mr. Adyasuren Tsohio, Minister of the Environment of Mongolia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdulkader Bagamal, Minister of Planning and Development of Yemen.

Mr. Abdulkader Bagamal, Minister of Planning and Development of Yemen, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Bagamal (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I am pleased to address the Assembly on behalf of the Republic of Yemen on this important occasion, the special session to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21. May I also express our support for the statement made by the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

This special session on Agenda 21 must take place within the substantive framework of a commitment by the international community to principle 7 of the Rio Principles, the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, which states that developed countries must acknowledge their responsibility to try to ensure sustainable development at the international level due to the pressures that their societies bring to bear on the international environment and to share the technologies and financial resources they have at their disposal.

The economic and social development achieved by Yemen in the last two decades has had a negative impact on the environment. There are indications of a possible imbalance in the required harmony between people and their environment in my country. The deterioration began with the rapid depletion of groundwater that was needed for agriculture, urban areas and industry. Furthermore, the quality of water in urban areas has declined because of the age of the distribution networks, a lack of maintenance and problems in the sanitation system. Other problems include soil deterioration resulting from vegetation being stripped, excessive cutting of trees and plant cover and desertification; a lack of adequate protection for coastal environments; a lack of biodiversity due to the extinction of rare species in the country; and some irresponsible foreign use of our waterways. The fact that the Republic of Yemen lies along international navigation routes in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, and the lack of control capabilities have threatened our marine environment, which has suffered the effects of waste materials being dumped by ships. Despite the lack of financial and technical means, with its limited Government resources and some support from donor circles the Republic of Yemen has been able to take some measures representing a basic and important plan to begin implementation of Agenda 21 and the Rio Principles.

My Government has endorsed the principle of sustainable development and the environmental-impact assessment of development projects. A law on the protection of the environment was adopted in 1995, making environmental planning an integral part of the overall development strategy in the country. The National Environmental Plan was set up between 1991 and 1995, providing for the drafting of legislation on the protection of the environment that reflect the principles of the Rio Summit. Furthermore, Yemen has ratified all international conventions spawned by Agenda 21. Our National Environmental Plan also provides for institutional measures and economic and financial measures for licensing, incentives, subsidies, sanctions and taxes in order to ensure the best possible use of natural resources and the development of our infrastructure. The five-year plan, which covers the period from 1996 to the year 2000, has laid down an environmental strategy because, in addition to its health and population, the environment is a constant factor in our development planning.

The management of the environment must be promoted within a particular governmental and non-governmental institutional framework. Thus, since the reunification of Yemen in 1990, we have established an institutional infrastructure in that field. First, the Council for the Protection of the Environment was created. Secondly, a general financing structure was established. Thirdly, governmental and non-governmental groups have been encouraged to work to protect the environment. Fourthly, a high-level committee has been created for Suqutra Island and its specific biodiversity.

The efforts made by my Government towards sustainable development face many financial, technical and institutional problems which limit our ability to

control the environmental variables that accompany economic development, particularly in the light of the rapidly increasing population and a very complex environment.

If it is to overcome these difficulties, Yemen requires support and assistance in the following fields: multifaceted scientific, administrative and institutional technical support; increased financing to implement environmental projects; specific plans for particular environments; support for educational programmes and research; and assistance for Yemen to improve its ability to monitor its coastal and marine environments in the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

In conclusion, we are confident that the international community, which accorded the utmost importance to this issue at the Rio Summit and in the principles issued therefrom, will follow up on its commitments by assisting developing countries to increase their ability to protect the environment and to make the best use of their natural resources. We look forward to regional and international cooperation beneficial to all, on the understanding that we are all neighbours in one world. We are all responsible, to the extent of our means, for protecting our world and our environment.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Planning and Development of Yemen.

Mr. Abdulkader Bagamal, Minister of Planning and Development of Yemen, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Valeriu Bulgari, First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Valeriu Bulgari, First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Bulgari (Moldova) (*interpretation from Russian*): It is a great honour for me to take part in this special session of the General Assembly, which is aimed at assessing the results of the implementation of the important decisions adopted at the Rio Conference in 1992.

We believe that this meeting offers us an excellent opportunity to engage in a pragmatic, even critical analysis of the current situation regarding sustainable development at the global, regional and national levels. Undoubtedly, the views expressed by the Heads of State and Government at the special session will contribute to strengthening cooperation aimed at resolving acute environmental problems.

The adoption of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 coincided with the onset of fundamental changes in the Republic of Moldova and with its achievement of independence. This entailed the need, on the one hand, to take into account the principles contained in Agenda 21 while drafting socio-economic development programmes in our country; and, on the other, to involve ourselves as much as possible in solving global ecological problems.

The political will of the Government of the Republic of Moldova was reflected in the adoption of a National Plan of Action on Environmental Protection and the ratification of major international ecological conventions, including the Conventions on climate change and biological diversity, as well as the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

The Republic of Moldova also pays equally close attention to cooperation on the subregional level, especially in the basins of the Danube River and the Black Sea. In this regard, we realize that the implementation of Agenda 21 implies the active participation of all parties involved: Government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, scientific circles and local communities. At present, more than 60 non-governmental organizations in the Republic are involved directly or indirectly in sustainable development projects. This is an important step towards the creation of civil society in the country.

It is widely known that mankind cannot at present afford to pay the price of economic growth with natural resource degradation and environmental pollution. That is why it is very important to prevent the adoption and application of ecologically harmful and imperfect technologies. In view of this, we would prefer that countries with economies in transition, the Republic of Moldova among them, not be considered by the industrialized countries as markets for such technologies and equipment, which are harmful to us all.

Many have already mentioned the negative consequences of global climate changes. This phenomenon is affecting all countries, and especially those in which agricultural is predominant in the economy. This is the case of the Republic of Moldova, where the number of years with abnormal weather

conditions has significantly increased within the last three decades, to the detriment of agriculture. While the ratio of agriculturally favourable to unfavourable years used to be three to two, during the past 5 years it has become one to four. In this context, it was good to learn from the statement of Mr. Wim Kok, the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the countries of the European Union, of their decision to take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere by 15 per cent.

We were also pleased to hear that these countries are prepared to implement on a multilateral basis the transfer of ecologically safe technologies to other countries, including countries in transition, through the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme.

We wish especially to emphasize an idea that has been referred to by many of those who have spoken: We cannot permit the burden of existing ecological problems to be passed on to our children and grandchildren. We are convinced that the solution of these problems is possible, but only provided that our declarations and political appeals are followed up by practical steps and real financial resources. To this end, the principle of global but differentiated responsibility should be applied according to the degree of harm inflicted by any given country on the world environment.

In conclusion, I should like to express the hope that the decision to be adopted at this session will contribute to the successful achievement of goals set down in Agenda 21 for the welfare of present and future generations.

The Acting President: I thank the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova for his statement.

Mr. Valeriu Bulgari, First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Duri Mohammed, Chairman of the delegation of Ethiopia.

Mr. Duri Mohammed, Chairman of the delegation of Ethiopia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Mohammed (Ethiopia): It is an honour and a pleasure for me to address this Assembly on the vital issue of sustainable development, on the issues of improving today and maintaining the improvement until tomorrow and beyond, so that the future may seek fresh avenues of further improvement free from the ghosts of yesterday.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has to cope with trying to harmonize today's outside world with a large part of the Ethiopian world of yesterday, which has been carried over to today. This is true of most of Africa.

This problem of harmonization is reflected in Africa's low economic development. This has resulted in widespread poverty in spite of an immense endowment of natural resources. This potential wealth has predisposed Africa to consequences that sometimes make endogenous initiative difficult. We thus see sustainable development not only as a sound path for development, but also as an international shield from external disruptive interferences. This, we believe, will help us ensure food security, that is, security of production and access for all our people. We are doing this by improving our agricultural sector and by creating the right conditions for all development strategies. We have already scored significant gains in agricultural improvement. Our agricultural systems are mostly rain-fed, which makes them easy victims of the vagaries of the weather. Food security therefore requires the ability to save produce from good years for use in bad years and to develop irrigation.

Both our overall development strategy and that of our agriculture in particular will thus require the further development of our substantial water resources. We are keen to do this in harmony with our downstream neighbours, who use water from rivers whose catchments are in Ethiopia.

Our geographical setting and our long and rich agricultural past has endowed us with a wealth of biodiversity in general, and agricultural biodiversity in particular. The wide range of environmental conditions in our agricultural areas has given us elements suitable to a large part of the range of agricultural areas in the world. For this reason, most of the world has been benefiting from these resources. We are happy that this is the case, and we want to continue giving what we have. But we believe that the present trend of taking our agricultural biodiversity and the knowledge associated with it and protecting them as the intellectual property of corporations of other countries is unjust and an abuse of our generosity and the generosity of countless other communities in the developing world.

Agenda 21 has tried to introduce justice into this world of inequity, which originates from one set of norms violating other sets of norms. Such encounters between differing norms is inevitable in a globalizing world. If we maximize the search for equity, globalization may turn out to be good for all. If the predatory aspects of the more aggressive norms are not curbed, the globalization effort will have far-reaching and negative consequences, and the process of globalization could be disrupted.

In this context, we are encouraged to hear that many of the leaders of the industrialized countries will be abiding by their original commitments and by those for new and additional funding envisaged in Agenda 21. We need it to soften the blow from the aggressive elements of the norms of the industrial system if we are to be effective trading partners. We are pleased, therefore, that the industrialized countries mean to help us, but they should also feel pleased that the globalization process, which is in their favour, will be safeguarded.

Once again, we would like to point to a significant commitment of goodwill with a special focus on Africa — the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. We are grateful that this Convention has entered into force, and hope that its implementation will not be hampered by the rather unclear situation surrounding its funding mechanism for it. During its negotiation, we had expressed our wish for a clearly defined funding mechanism. We hope that our fears will prove unfounded and that the implementation of the Convention will be adequately funded.

Agenda 21 looks at fragile ecosystems not only in arid areas but also in mountainous areas. Ethiopia is mountainous where it is not arid, and arid where it is not mountainous. We hope that the focus on fragile mountain ecosystems given in Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 will be matched by the development of programmes of action with technical, technological and financial resources commensurate to the problem we are facing.

We have been feeling that maybe Rio was becoming a once-off flare that is now fading. We are being reassured now that it is indeed a beacon to lead us into a better future. We are happy with the reassurance, and we promise to do our best to work in the spirit of Rio. We have already gone some distance. We have a comprehensive environmental policy developed by all stakeholders through a participatory process. The legislative and administrative arrangements to implement it are partly in place and partly being developed.

We will continue to do more and to contribute our share to the bettering of our world.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Ethiopia for his statement.

Mr. Duri Mohammed, Chairman of the delegation of Ethiopia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Philip Dimitrov, Chairman of the delegation of Bulgaria.

Mr. Philip Dimitrov, Chairman of the delegation of Bulgaria, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Dimitrov (Bulgaria): It is an honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the Government of Bulgaria, one of the Eastern European countries that has suffered the most, both in the dark ages of communist rule and in the difficult and at times ambiguous period of the past seven years. A nationwide effort is now being made in my country to effect a quick and irreversible transition to a democratic society with a market economy based on freedom and respect for human rights and on the common values of the United Nations. Without this, a globalist approach is hardly possible.

Allow me first to express our full support for the statement made on Monday by Mr. Wim Kok, Prime Minister of the Netherlands, on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries.

My country shares the view of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) as a milestone in the promotion of international cooperation and action on sustainable development. We welcome the results achieved in implementing the recommendations of the Earth Summit, especially the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and, most recently, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. At the same time, we believe that a lot more remains to be done.

Mobilizing adequate financial resources for the UNCED follow-up is among the most important tasks of

the international community. We welcome the restructuring and further replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). We believe that national Governments should promote innovative financial mechanisms aimed at utilizing all potential sources available, and we support initiatives such as "debt-for-nature" swaps.

Bulgaria firmly supports the three initiatives put forward by the Netherlands presidency of the European Union — the eco-efficiency initiative, the global programme of action for freshwater resources and the common strategy for a sustainable energy future. We believe that we will also have to look at new approaches, such as the "factor 4" concept.

With respect to the worldwide decrease in the availability and quality of water, we believe that increased international cooperation is urgently needed, in particular among the countries alongside transboundary water courses.

Programmes for energy efficiency are currently under preparation by the Government. However, their implementation will require financial support from the international financial institutions.

We look forward to the rapid implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and to the speeding up of the negotiations on the biosafety protocol. Bulgaria supports the German initiative to set up a worldwide network of protected areas under that Convention.

Bulgaria expects the ongoing negotiations in Kyoto on the Convention on Climate Change to be concluded with a protocol containing legally binding commitments for a significant reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and other mandatory and recommended policies and measures.

We consider the Commission on Sustainable Development to be an important instrument in the follow-up process of the Rio Conference; it has, incidentally, managed to maintain a high political profile. We believe that a framework for larger intersessional meetings and attendance not only by ministers of the environment but also by ministers of finance, planning, development cooperation, forestry, agriculture, and so forth, as well as by representatives of non-governmental organizations should be further encouraged.

Bulgaria considers the coordination of national efforts at the regional level to be of crucial importance for achieving the goals of Agenda 21. That is why the third ministerial conference on the Environment for Europe process was held in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, in 1995. We are now actively involved in the preparatory work for the fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment for Europe, which will be held in Århus, Denmark, next year.

Reform in my country was often confronted with the inability of the former communist rulers of the country to accept change. Still, holding the principles of national peace, nonviolence and representative democracy to be irrevocable, my people managed to sustain the transition, though sometimes at a painfully slow pace. In the past several months, however, in a series of presidential and parliamentary elections, the nation has expressed its determination to achieve democratic development, openness and a European and Atlantic orientation, and the Government is now working hard to compensate for the destructive results of almost four years of communist restoration.

A number of strategic documents in the field of environmental protection have been adopted in Bulgaria. These include the National Biodiversity Protection and Conservation Strategy, the Sustainable Forestry Strategy, the National Action Plan for Protecting the Wetlands, the Programme for Phasing Out Leaded Gasoline, the National Programme for Phasing Out Ozone-Depleting Substances and others.

Bulgaria is facing serious difficulties in implementing its national programmes owing to the lack of sufficient financial resources. In this respect we appreciate the support provided by international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank, by the Phare Democracy Programme of the European Union and by the Governments of Germany, the United States of America, Switzerland, Denmark, Japan and other donor countries. In 1995 a National Environmental Trust Fund was established to manage the resources generated by debt-for-nature swap deals and by grants from Governments and international financial institutions.

The reforms that are being speedily undertaken by the new Bulgarian Government are aimed at improving administration and economic management, which will inevitably influence the sustainable development agenda through changes in the structure of the administration, privatization and the provision of a legal basis for responsible management, the introduction of better management standards by building international business links and attracting foreign investments, improvement of productivity, technological innovation and the development of environmental skills and awareness.

The Capacity 21 Programme for Bulgaria, which started early this year, is a step towards a national sustainable development strategy. At the national level, a National Commission for Sustainable Development, chaired by a deputy prime minister, was recently established, and at the community level a participatory process has been set out for generating models for sustainable community development.

Thus, I dare say that our main contribution to sustainable development was the push forward to the democratic and market reforms in the country.

In addition, I would like to mention that it is a priority of the new Bulgarian Government to promote the role of women in development. This is well illustrated by the broad participation of women in the new Bulgarian Government. Particular attention is also being paid to young people, who have played an active part in the nationwide effort for the achievement of sustainable democratic development — in other words, for maintaining the democratic process. This is our hope for the future and our guarantee for the protection of our human and natural resources for the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the Delegation of Bulgaria for his statement.

Mr. Philip Dimitrov, Chairman of the Delegation of Bulgaria, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Arnulfo Fretes Escario, Vice-Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment of Paraguay.

Mr. Arnulfo Fretes Escario, Vice-Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment of Paraguay, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Fretes Escario (Paraguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Five years after the Rio Conference, Paraguay is building an enhanced awareness of the issue of environmental preservation. This results from the Government's efforts, which are based on the 1992 Constitution of Paraguay, which establishes environmental protection as a high priority. The first chapter of the Constitution includes and elucidates concepts such as quality of life, the right to a healthy environment, environmental protection and the foundations for agrarian reform and rural development.

It was with this awareness and these endeavours that we went to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, where more than 150 countries acknowledged the necessity of adopting measures and renewing bilateral and multilateral commitments to guarantee the conservation of the Earth's diverse forms of life, thus to ensure the survival of the human race through the achievement of the sustainable development we so earnestly hope for.

One of the most important achievements of the Rio summit was the adoption of Agenda 21, by which Governments agreed to adopt measures that would lead to the protection and appropriate utilization of their natural resources. In that context, my country signed the various declarations and conventions of the Conference, creating an opportunity to obtain the financial and technical support necessary to achieve the targets set out in Agenda 21.

It is important to recall that the Rio summit laid down the key elements that all Governments should address to achieve sustainable development, a concept that contains the idea that the human person has the right to a healthy and productive life; it is therefore at the heart of concerns relating to development.

Paraguay reaffirms its faith in the fundamental principle of common but differentiated responsibility. In this regard we note with concern the delay in the implementation of commitments assumed at Rio, particularly with regard to financial assistance and technology transfer. Without the necessary support, many of our countries will continue to grapple with the ecology of poverty. Complete fulfilment of these commitments is the only viable way to achieve sustainable economic development and social well-being along with the preservation of a healthy environment.

From the beginning of the term of office of President Juan Carlos Wasmosy, concrete, specific measures have been adopted aimed at a sustained improvement of our country's environment. To that end, we have formulated a strategy for the management, use, conservation and protection of natural resources, in the framework of the commitments assumed under Agenda 21, with a view to consolidating the concept of sustainable development.

To this end, my Government has framed an approach to sustainable development consistent with local conditions: sustainable development is a model intended

gradually to transform systems of production and consumption in keeping with equitable ethical principles, to distribute more fairly the benefits of the economic process with full support for ecological, cultural and territorial integrity and creating ample opportunity for participation by society.

With the aim of making decisive strides towards the commitments undertaken at the Earth Summit, we have begun to restructure our national policy: interdependent and integrated economic and social sectors participate in a new policy that will make possible the more equitable utilization of natural resources and the preservation of the environment. We have adapted the current framework of environmental law with a view to adapting and harmonizing the actions of socio-economic actors to be in keeping with these strategic guidelines.

Our national policy on the environment is founded on the following principles: government action to maintain the ecological balance, considering natural resources as a national heritage that must be protected and used in a sustainable way by the community; the planning, monitoring and control of the use of natural resources; and the rational use of the soil, subsoil, water, air, flora and fauna. Our policy is based on the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity and the creation of more conservation areas, national parks and biological reserves; support for regional and municipal government in land-use planning; and support for study of and research into technologies aimed at the rational use and protection of natural resources. It is also based on control of polluting activities through the implementation of the environmental impact assessment law and penalties for ecological offences; and on the strengthening of environmental education at all levels of instruction and increasing the awareness of our citizens so that they can participate in the search for solutions to environmental problems.

Of the new environmental laws in force, those that stand out include the legislation on environmental impact, wildlife, protected wild areas and the law providing penalties for ecological offences.

In the last three decades, we have seen high rates of deforestation in the country, with an accelerating decline in broad expanses of native forest to make way for the expansion of the frontiers of agricultural production. Given this situation, and the need to reforest suitable land, we have introduced a law on the promotion of forestry and reforestation, which constitutes a historical milestone in the task of recovering forest areas. This unprecedented law provides subsidies for 75 per cent of the direct cost of forest plantations, in addition to care and maintenance support for the first two years after replanting. In 1995 and 1996 we subsidized the replanting of the first 2,500 hectares. This year plans have been submitted and approved for the reforestation of a total of 45,000 hectares, and this is already being implemented. From June 1996 to June 1997, 6.5 million trees were planted.

International commitments in the environmental sphere deserve special attention. In the framework of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), which we are chairing at present, we have initiated the gradual harmonization of environmental laws among all the States parties. In this way, the legal frameworks of States members will not act as barriers to trade integration, and, at the same time, such integration will not to take place to the detriment of natural resources and the environment.

We are in the process of ratifying the international conventions agreed to under Agenda 21, taking into account the importance of international contacts and cooperation in environmental matters. With respect to the agreements under in the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, we have created a national inventory of products used nationally, identifying producers and consumers. National universities and those directly concerned have participated in this. With regard to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, we have requested the necessary resources from the Global Environment Facility so that national technicians can qualify and be trained to prepare a national inventory of greenhouse gases.

Paraguay, together with other countries of the region, is proceeding with the drafting of a national profile of the use of chemical substances. This initiative will have long-term effects through a participatory model for the secure management and use of toxic chemical products through a strategic plan. In January 1997, we submitted the legal instrument ratifying our commitment with regard to the Convention to Combat Desertification. In this context, the countries sharing the *Gran Chaco* region — Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina — have begun working together towards a model of cooperation for sustainable development for this large area. Similarly, we have begun a national programme to conserve biodiversity based on a commitment to cooperation between governmental and non-governmental agencies to ensure the care of various species. This action will enable us to strengthen our national position on the right to shared benefits resulting from the use of biodiversity.

There are other commitments that are important for progress towards sustainable development. These include the Basel Convention and agreements on hazardous substances and the El Niño phenomenon, whose application at the national level is developing on a comprehensive and gradual basis. The national strategy to adopt the principles of the Earth Summit demonstrates the interest of the Government of Paraguay in advancing firmly towards the goals underlying the concept of sustainable development.

The nineteenth special session of the United Nations General Assembly, on progress made under Agenda 21, provides an excellent opportunity to exchange information as well as to extend and strengthen cooperation with regard to national and global policies and ensure protection of the environment within the framework of the sustainable use of natural resources.

We are grateful to the President of the General Assembly for his attention to this matter, and we congratulate him for the way he has managed and conducted this important meeting. Let us also stress the great spirit of brotherhood and solidarity shown by all representatives. We feel certain that the great chain that unites our peoples will continue to grow ever stronger for the benefit of all beings who inhabit and evolve on this planet.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I thank the Vice-Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment of Paraguay for his statement.

Mr. Arnulfo Fretes Escario, Vice-Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment of Paraguay, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Taye Wah Michel Wan Chat Kwong, Chairman of the delegation of Mauritius.

Mr. Taye Wah Michel Wan Chat Kwong, Chairman of the delegation of Mauritius, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Wan Chat Kwong (Mauritius): When we left Rio five years ago we were filled with high hopes and optimism. We had made important commitments and promises with regard to things we were going to do to improve the world and, indeed, safeguard it for future generations.

Two days ago, the British Prime Minister spoke of his three young children on whose behalf, in part, he was attending this special session. I, too, would like to direct my thoughts to children, in particular those children who, on the last day of the Rio Conference, took the floor and addressed a very pertinent question to the assembled representatives. They asked them — their elders, those who are meant to love them and whom they trusted to care for them and protect them — why the world was in a worse state than it was at the time they were born. The delegates present were all quite embarrassed and most of them bowed their heads in silence.

Today in 1997, five years later, the situation is in many respects worse than before. Poverty has risen since 1992. Increasing at rate of nearly 25 million a year, the number of people currently living in absolute poverty is roughly 1.3 billion. Desertification and deforestation have continued. Our water resources are depleting and water quality is being degraded. We have not found any better solutions in the field of energy, and world industries, mainly in industrialized countries, are continuing to spew out greenhouse gases. In short, it is business as usual. The frequency and intensity of natural disasters have increased, a phenomenon which is attributed to the changes in climate as a result of the greenhouse effect. Instead of reaching for the promised target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product, official development assistance from many donor countries has actually decreased. The level of funding for the Global Environment Facility has been far from adequate.

These are just some of the indicators from which we can only conclude that there has been, for the most part, a regrettable lack of progress since 1992. Yet in Rio we committed ourselves to join hands in a global effort as environmental problems know no frontiers. Concerted effort is inescapable. We will not move forward if those who can will not help those in the developing countries who have difficulties in implementing Agenda 21, through adequate financial flows and transfer of appropriate technology.

If there is no determined international concerted effort to eradicate poverty and to improve the quality of life of the poor, then we will have the classical scenario of poverty breeding environmental decay.

(*spoke in French*)

Mauritius is a developing country with very limited resources, but it intends to respect fully its commitments

entered into in Rio. We have therefore acceded to many conventions on the environment, notably the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

With regard to the energy sector, we have implemented a vigorous policy to promote the best use of renewable sources of energy. In this way we have been promoting research and development on the use of bagasse, a by-product of sugar cane, in order to generate electricity.

We are also encouraging our fellow citizens, particularly through fiscal measures, to make use of solar energy, especially for domestic use. This programme has been very successful in our country.

At the regional level my country is working very closely with the member States of the of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Commission on the Indian Ocean to promote research-and-development projects and capacity-building.

(*spoke in English*)

As an island State, Mauritius is particularly interested in the concerns addressed in Agenda 21 relating to small island developing States and the subsequent Barbados Programme of Action, adopted in 1994. Unfortunately, those concerns have not been translated into concrete actions so far, mainly because of the lack of new and additional resources.

We also regret the appreciable lack of progress in the reduction of the emission of greenhouse gases and the unwillingness of some industrialized countries to curb their pollution levels. We therefore urge all industrialized countries to take the appropriate measures to make deep cuts in their carbon-dioxide emissions. For small island States, particularly low-lying countries, this is a matter of survival.

Finally, my appeal to the Assembly is that we need action now, for tomorrow it will be too late. When we meet in five years' time for the next review meeting, I sincerely hope that we will not have to ask that same question as those children asked at Rio.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I thank the Head of delegation of Mauritius for his statement.

Mr. Taye Wah Michel Wan Chat Kwong, Chairman of the delegation of Mauritius, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker on the list is His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Meguid (League of Arab States) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I am very pleased to be here in this Assembly which has brought together statesmen from all over the world. It is my pleasure to congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency of the General Assembly at this nineteenth special session. Thanks are also due to all those through whose efforts and thinking have made it possible for this special session to take place.

In the speech that I made five years ago in Rio, I affirmed that the Arab countries were aware that the preservation and protection of the environment and the implementation of sustainable development required intense international and regional efforts in order to overcome the obstacles in the way of finding solutions to urgent international environmental problems.

The Arab countries, convinced of the importance of the environment and its conservation, adopted in 1986, the Arab Declaration on Environment and Development and Future Prospects, which established a link between development and the environment. This Declaration, adopted by the ad hoc council of ministers for the environment of Arab countries, spelt out the guidelines for development and environmental priorities for the Arab countries.

The implementation of Agenda 21 requires that we all make every possible effort in order to meet the challenges facing the countries in the region and to offset the most serious dangers ahead of us. The very actions that have been taken in the occupied Arab territories — in the Syrian Golan, the West Bank and Gaza — have resulted in the destruction of the environment and in atmospheric pollution. This means that the international community should rapidly take appropriate steps in order to implement principle 23 of the Rio Declaration, according to which there is a need to protect the environment and natural resources of people subjected to occupation, oppression and domination.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development provided a unique opportunity to galvanize all the countries of the world and to focus their attention on the questions of the future development of our Earth. Now, after the policy-making stage, we have to proceed to carry out real action in order to ensure the protection of the environment and the rational utilization of resources to achieve sustainable development. This is something all of us very much desire. To this end, we have to reinforce and step up international cooperation to reaffirm the commitments contained in principle 8 of the Rio Declaration, regarding the responsibilities assumed by the developed countries with regard to achieving sustainable development.

Despite the interest shown by the Arab countries in environmental action and the need to conserve the environment since the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, there are still environmental problems facing the Arab world: first and foremost, soil erosion, desertification and deforestation; secondly, water shortage, environmental degradation and repercussions on socioeconomic projects in general and on rural and agricultural development in particular; thirdly, increased pressure on coastal and marine ecosystems, resulting in environmental degradation, with serious consequences for tourism and fisheries; fourthly, increased urbanization and deterioration of the urban environment in parallel with a reduction of natural resources in rural areas due to the continued abandonment of agricultural lands and air and industrial pollution in a number of countries experiencing considerable industrial development; and fifthly, decreasing biodiversity due to the multiple threats to local flora and fauna.

I am convinced that this gathering, thanks to its constant efforts, will be able to reach extraordinary results that will ensure that we pursue the implementation of Agenda 21. The League of Arab States, for its part, is more willing than ever to work together with its international Arab partners to build a better future for planet Earth, so that we can achieve our purposes and ensure mankind the dignity it deserves.

The Acting President: I thank the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for his statement.

Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker on the list is His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Auf, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Ibrahim Auf, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Auf (Organization of the Islamic Conference) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The great challenge facing humanity today concerns achieving our socioeconomic development without adversely affecting our planet's delicate environmental balance. This was the main issue before the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which produced the answer in Agenda 21.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the world's second largest intergovernmental organization, after the United Nations, with its 54 member States, represents over one billion people who inhabit vast geographical territories of the world between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, with all the types of land, sea and climatic conditions that this planet is blessed with. It is, therefore, natural that successive resolutions of Islamic summits and conferences of Foreign Minsters reaffirm OIC adherence to and support of all relevant world conventions, declarations and plans of action, as well as of the conferences and international institutions that enhance the objectives of Agenda 21. In fact, the governing organs of the organizations I mentioned have continually urged member States to sign and ratify those conventions and to move forward with the implementation of the programmes contained therein at the national, regional and global levels.

I am gratified to report that the response has been encouraging and that the member States of the OIC are playing an active role both individually and collectively within the Group of 77 and fulfilling their obligations to the extent that their resources and capacities allow. Several of our member States have in fact achieved impressive progress at the national level in different environmental fields. Each, according to its local circumstances, has enacted relevant legislation and endeavoured to mobilize the necessary budgetary and institutional tools to serve this purpose. These efforts are continuing.

I should, however, refer to the constraints and enormous difficulties that are being encountered by many of the member States of the organization owing to limited human and material resources. This calls for the

supportive role of the developed countries, especially the Group of Seven, to realize the goal of allocating 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to finance environmental and development programmes. A major constraint on these efforts is presented by the ongoing debt problem of the developing countries. The transfer of clean technologies to the developing countries is also urgently required. With at least a minimum of ethical values, the task of coping with the problems of radioactive, toxic and dangerous wastes also needs to be tackled firmly and speedily.

A number of studies and consultations recently conducted within the member States of the OIC have indicated that certain types of environmental problems have become critical in these countries. These are principally the effects of drought, desertification, floods, the threat of submergence under rising sea levels, earthquakes, hurricanes and so forth. Added to these natural disasters are man-made catastrophes like widespread minefields, the dumping of radioactive and toxic wastes, the growing number of regional and internal civil wars and the ensuing problems of refugees and famine.

In this context, I would like to express to this special session the deep concern felt by the member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference at the escalation of the illegal and inhuman practices being perpetrated in the Middle East region which have resulted in serious consequences for humankind and the environment in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. Israel, regrettably, persists in its policies which are detrimental to the environment, including by confiscating about 50 per cent of the Arab lands in the occupied territories, prohibiting agriculture and construction in the confiscated lands, usurping 70 per cent of Palestinian water resources, uprooting fruit-bearing trees, such as olive trees, the symbol of peace, destroying crops, interrupting irrigation and burning forests. Perhaps the biggest disaster has been the dumping of toxic wastes in the Palestinian territories, as happened recently in Al-Khalil, Hebron. Undoubtedly, these and other intensely harmful practices constitute a blatant challenge to Principle 23 of the Rio Declaration.

It is highly deplorable that this same State in the Middle East region, which has been unanimously declared an area free of nuclear arms, persists in its nuclear military programme, refuses to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons or sign the agreement on guarantees and inspection facilities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency, refuses to submit a statement on its nuclear stockpiles and stubbornly rejects the call to disclose how it treats its nuclear wastes, either in a bilateral or a multilateral framework, all in flagrant violation of Principle 14 of the same Rio Declaration.

From the rostrum at this session, I verily declare that peace is a prerequisite for undertaking any development or for devising any sound ecosystem. I therefore appeal to the international community assembled here to mobilize all efforts to put an end to such extremely dangerous practices.

In conclusion, I would reaffirm the adherence and full support of the member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the noble objectives of this special session. We sincerely hope for its success, which will be a victory for our generation, in securing a safe future for our children and the succeeding generations of humankind.

Peace be upon you all.

The Acting President: I thank the Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference for his statement.

Mr. Ibrahim Auf, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker on the list is Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund.

Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, was escorted to the rostrum.

Dr. Sadik (United Nations Population Fund): Five years after the Earth Summit adopted Agenda 21 there is some good news to report on the population aspects of development. Thanks to widespread growth in the voluntary use of family planning, nearly all regions are experiencing lower fertility and lower population growth rates. Six out of ten women have access to a range of reproductive health choices. As a result, the global population is growing by 1.5 per cent a year, rather than the 2 per cent growth rates of the sixties and early seventies.

Yet, population continues to grow by 81 million people a year. Annual additions are declining slowly but

will remain over 75 million for another decade. High rates of growth are concentrated amongst the lowest-income countries.

Nearly two thirds of world population growth is in Asia and the Pacific region. Despite many successful programmes, rapid growth remains a developmental issue in several South Asian countries and among both urban and rural low-income populations elsewhere. In many Asian countries, environmental pressures come from increasing consumption and demand for natural resources, combined with the rapid growth of urban populations. For West Asia, rapid growth in contrast with limited natural resources is an emerging policy issue. The unique circumstances of the small island States of the Pacific reflect the dependence of countries on limited land and ocean resources.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, fragile ecosystems in poor rural areas are continually endangered by the rapid expansion of human settlements. Although the region's era of rapid population growth is largely over, its impact is still felt in the high proportion of young people in the population. The Caribbean shares many of the concerns of Pacific island States, such as high rates of adolescent fertility, emigration and vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change.

Fertility remains very high in many African countries, though there are many encouraging signs of a trend towards smaller families. The availability of fresh water and land resources for increasing populations is a critical development issue for many African countries.

For Europe, as for all industrialized countries, and increasingly for developing countries, the main population concerns are those related to the consequences of increasing numbers of elderly people, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the population. Industrialized countries are also concerned about international migration, since nearly all are now net receivers, rather than senders, of migrants.

For many developing countries, slower population growth in the near future is a highly desirable and attainable policy option. Explicitly integrating population into economic and development strategies will both speed the pace of sustainable growth and contribute to the achievement of population objectives.

There is only one effective way to ensure that population growth rates are low and stay low, and that is to ensure that every woman and man can exercise her or his full reproductive rights. Like all human rights, the right to reproductive health is an end in itself. Universal access to a full range of reproductive choices, together with broader health services and education, will ensure that individuals and couples have only the number of children they choose. That in itself will ensure smaller families and slower population growth in the years ahead. Bringing the full range of choices to all — women and men — and making it possible for all to exercise that choice should be a priority for all countries.

Women's power of control over their reproductive health affects the entire range of their activities, including many which are vital to sustainable development. Guaranteeing women the opportunity for choice in the crucial decisions that shape their lives — through better access to education and the opportunity for fairly paid occupation outside the home; through the universal provision of reproductive health services, including family planning and sexual health; through moves towards equity and equality — is an end in itself; but it is also an essential element in progress towards sustained and sustainable development.

Offering the full range of reproductive health services is cost-effective in terms both of technology and of national capabilities. The techniques of service delivery are well known and have been tested over many years in a variety of national situations. The resources required are within the reach of all countries, provided that all are willing to honour the commitments they made at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994.

In Cairo, the ICPD agreed that universal access to reproductive health, universal access to education and gender equality in education were viable goals for the year 2015. The Cairo Conference also agreed on targets for maternal and infant mortality reduction and for life expectancy. Uniquely among the recent series of international conferences on social development, ICPD also agreed on the resources required to achieve those goals.

From Rio to Rome, virtually all countries participated in the consensus-building exercise. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights took note of the importance of population issues for human rights. The World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, as well as Habitat II and the World Food Summit, confirmed the Cairo consensus on population. There is now increasing support for that consensus.

Many developing countries and some industrialized countries have moved decisively from rhetoric to action. But all countries must continue and intensify their work, including the requirement for additional resources: $17 billion a year from all sources by the year 2000.

This special session meets after five years of the most intensive international discussions ever held on questions of social development. It helps in our review of Agenda 21 that there is now a clear understanding that environmental and population approaches to sustainable development are not alternatives — they are opposite sides of the same coin. If we approach them from the point of view of the rights and needs of ordinary women and men and their children, we will be on the road to finding the long-sought balance among population, resources and the environment.

The Acting President: I thank the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund for her statement.

Ms. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker on the list is Ms. Wangari Maathai of the Women's Environment and Development Organization, speaking on behalf of the Women's Major Group.

Ms. Wangari Maathai of the Women's Environment and Development Organization was escorted to the rostrum.

Ms. Maathai (Women's Environment and Development Organization): On behalf of women as a major group, which represents half of the world's population, we would like to thank members for this opportunity to share some of our concerns at this Assembly.

Having listened to and monitored the long negotiations between the various power blocs and political interests represented at this special session, we want to express our deep concern that many of the commitments and targets agreed upon five years ago at the Earth Summit remain unfulfilled. We wonder whether the vision of Rio has been set aside and replaced by the old cynical view that the world will always be divided between rich and poor, the powerful and the weak? Will there always be a North and a South — a small South in the North and a small North in the South? Will the two worlds honour the Rio commitments and emerge from this meeting with a renewed sense of urgency and, indeed, move from words to deeds?

As long as the world's power blocs prefer to hide behind groups and alliances, behind dehumanizing history, traditional heritages, debilitating debt burdens, unfair and unjust trade — all of which put profits before people — calls to reduce poverty and to promote peace, justice and equality for all will continue to be just that: calls. This could easily lead the world into a position where individual blocs will continue to stand up only for the section of society that they identify with, only for the part of the world they live in and only for the interest groups they believe in. Although I stand here today representing women as a major group, let me be clear: We are not a special interest group. As half the world's population, we speak for the common good of all people.

There are promises and commitments for gender justice from the Heads of Governments, as there were in Rio, but it is still more words than action. Many issues are still within brackets: the burden of debts, poverty, the violation of human rights, the environmental and social costs of globalization, unemployment, economic disparities both between and within countries, threats to biodiversity, soil degradation and depletion of forests, rights to clean drinking water, land and education. All these are issues which threaten life in all its forms and they are imprisoned within the walls of global divides that prevent the formation of true partnerships, genuine cooperation and progress. That is why the Women's Caucus has been working hard to break down the walls which divide us, free the words from the brackets and get down to action to move us forward.

In this connection, the Women's Caucus has produced a 12-point action plan on "What Women Want for Earth". We have specific recommendations grouped under such imperatives as gender equality; elimination of poverty; guided globalization to ensure fair, just trade and corporate accountability; preservation and equitable sharing of the earth's resources; access to clean drinking water; safe and clean energy; sustainable production and consumption; education and training for individuals and communities; and the recognition that women's rights are human rights. It is very important to prevent exploitation, especially of women and children; provide security, especially from poverty and diseases; and bring down the walls of race and the urge to dominate and exploit.

The unsustainable and wasteful patterns of production and consumption that characterize the lifestyle of the rich and industrialized countries are being adopted in poor developing countries at a higher rate than we may be willing to admit. Indeed, many individuals and

communities in the developed countries have done more in recycling, curbing pollution, greening, cleaning up rivers and lakes and protecting trees and forests than can be said of some of the poor countries.

This is not always because such countries are too poor and cannot promote sustainable development without outside help. It is possible for poor countries to demand that international companies and Governments refrain from testing nuclear technology and from dumping toxic materials and pollutants in other people's neighbourhoods; that they do not exploit human and material resources; and that they practice fair and just trade, respect the culture and values of host communities and compensate those they aggrieve. It is also possible and reasonable for such companies and Governments to reinvest some of their profits in the communities where they operate and therefore contribute to sustainable development instead of contributing to the poverty and dehumanization of marginalized groups.

Talking of a lack of financial resources is sometimes misleading, because at the same time Governments spend millions of dollars on militarism, littering agricultural land with mines and engaging in military conflicts that create millions of refugees. The security of people and the survival of all forms of life on earth in all communities are constantly sacrificed in favour of bigger profits in ever-fewer hands. We must from here send a message of hope, not of despair, to the millions of people in the world. If hope cannot come from such a forum as this, do we really believe in the interdependence of nations and in the family of humankind?

This is a coming together of world leaders to ensure the survival of the planet and all its wonders and mysteries. This must be a meeting where Governments and civil society assume our responsibilities. Why, for example, can we not agree on an Earth Charter similar to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights? Why can we not make Rio a living reality? Why can we not realize that we have only one earth, that we are all in it together, that no one is safe until we all are safe?

The Acting President: I thank the representative of the Women's Environment and Development Organization, speaking on behalf of the Women's Major Group, for her statement.

Ms. Wangari Maathai of the Women's Environment and Development Organization was escorted from the rostrum.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.